



Al-Risala 1985

July

Editorial

It is one's attitude to life that matters more than anything in life; it is that which determines one's actions. There are no two opinions about it.

The most serious blunder committed by Muslims in the present age has been their adoption of an attitude towards their non-Muslim brethren which is quite contrary to the teachings of Islam. Muslims have no doubt suffered greatly at the hands of non-Muslims in political and economic fields and they have reacted to this by turning against them and considering them as their rivals. Such a reactionary attitude, far from conforming to Islamic teachings, is totally against the spirit of Islam. According to Islam the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims is one of Dae'e (preacher) and Mad'u (congregation); one of love, sympathy and good will, and not one of hate and rivalry. The adoption of such an attitude, of Dae'e and Mad'u brings about a transformation of attitudes towards others. Just as a businessman will bear all kinds of provocation from his customers in order to be able to do business with them, similarly it is imperative that a preacher be willing to bear all sorts of provocations from his congregation, in order to create an ambience in which his congregation will be sufficiently well-disposed to lend a serious ear to his call. Businessmen and preachers have goals which are obviously very different in nature, but they do have a great deal in common in the method of their functioning: in the face of obduracy, it is their tolerance which brings them success. It has aptly been said: God makes commerce his missionary.

2 July 1985

It is one who knows how to maintain silence who is fit to speak

This is how Imam Auza'i's pupil, Abu'l Fazl Ibn-ul Walid Ibn Mazid described his own teacher: "From looking at Imam Auza'i's books, one may gain the impression that he was a loquacious person; but I have never seen anyone who remained quiet more than him." (Abdur Rahman Auza'i by Sheikh Taha Al-Wali)

3 July 1985

Only God can make a Tree

"Nature works," says Emerson, "on a method of all for each and each for all." This sums up the process at work in the universe. There are innumerable forces in nature functioning with amazing coordination, in complete harmony with one another. The whole corresponds to the part and vice versa.

God has set this example on the universal scale. Man should follow the same pattern displayed in nature. Every individual is required to lead his life keeping in view the interests of society and society should work towards the betterment of individuals. Thus the function of society and the function of the individual should coincide with and conform to one another.

God has thus established a model in the form of the universe which is making a permanent appeal to maintain an equilibrium of interests, and is making the likes and dislikes of God plain to man. If man were to heed this universal message, he could surely be guided along the straight path, the path which would earn God's favour.

Let us take the example of a tree vis-à-vis the universe. In the universe, there is heat, gravity, air, water, to list but a few physical elements. Everything is exactly in accordance with the requirements of a tree. All things from the sun down to the bacteria serve as food for the tree. They coincide with the requirements of a tree.

Similarly a tree grows up gradually without coming into conflict with anything around it. The world benefits from its wood, branches and fruit. Even its breathing in carbon dioxide and breathing out oxygen is in accordance with the needs of the external world. The same coordination is required of man between a part and the whole, i.e., the individual and the society. There is no other path which leads man to success.

3 July 1985

Excelling in actions rather than words

Imam Abdul Rahman Auzaa'i (88-157AH) was a great scholar, but he used to remain silent most of the time. Once he said: "A true believer speaks little and acts much, while a hypocrite speaks much and acts little,"

Kindness to the Helpless

To give shelter to those who have nowhere to go in society is an act of worship of the highest excellence. Every human being is liable to fall into need at some time: a mother and father reach the end of their life; a child becomes an orphan; a traveler falls into difficulties far from his native land; at times such as these a person is completely dependent on others. To come to his or her rescue at such times of crisis is a deed highly pleasing to God. God will not let such action go unrewarded. There are countless verses of the Quran, and sayings of the Prophet of Islam, which emphasize the importance of being charitable to those in need.

The reason that offering help to the helpless is so pleasing to God is that it is a practical acknowledgement that every man is inherently helpless before the Lord. It is not only those who are being helped who are helpless. Those who are helping them are in the same position, for everything is in God's hands: He gives and takes as He pleases. To realize this fact is to believe in God, and to express this realization in the form of actions pleasing to God is to worship Him.

But the only way of telling if a person is true in his faith and his worship is to see how he deals with a weak and helpless human being. A person is brought before us in this world in the same state of helplessness in which we will be brought before God in the next world. There is no pressure on us to help him. So there will be no pressure on God to help us out in the next world. He has done nothing to earn re compensation with us; so we will not be deserving of God's reward when we come before Him in the hereafter. But if we are kind to such a person, while praying to God that He should be kind to us when we come before Him in a state of need and destitution, then there is hope that God will look with favour upon our actions and our prayers.

To be kind to those in need is to acknowledge that we are all in need; we all depend on God's mercy. We all stand alone; we are all in need of God's assistance. If we pray for God's mercy and help, then we should also show that we are willing to help and show mercy to others. One who believes in God, and sees how helpless he is before the Lord, should, when he sees the helplessness of others, immediately remember his own position; if he really desires God's assistance for himself, he should be quick to run to the assistance of others.

One who really feels his own helplessness before God feels like giving everything he has away to the helpless, so that he in his turn may receive a full share in God's blessings. He feels compelled to do his utmost to give one in need a helping hand, so that God may come to his own rescue at his hour of dire need.

5 July 1985

The Importance of Being Simple

In a BBC film documentary on Lord Mountbatten; one of the many interesting incidents concerns Queen Elizabeth. On the occasion of her marriage with Prince Philips, Gandhiji sent her a gift-a table cover woven from the yarn he himself had spun. Obviously it must have been like a coarse mat, but the Queen graciously accepted it.

Some years later Mountbatten wanted it to be displayed in an, exhibition on Mahatma Gandhi in the National Gallery. In spite of having it searched for everywhere he failed to find it in the collections of the gallery. It then occurred to him that perhaps, for security purposes, it might have been preserved in the Tower of London. But it was not available even there.

One day, in the course of conversation with Queen Elizabeth, Lord Mountbatten casually mentioned its loss. The Queen immediately opened her special drawer, and said while taking it out: "Oh, why did you not ask me, I let nobody else touch that. I keep that to myself."

What prompted her to take such special care of it? It perhaps struck her as a symbol of simplicity, in which she perceived a certain spiritual quality.

In a similar vein, once a group of Tablighi Jama'at (a religious party) went to England. They were clad in coarse long shirts, three quarter length trousers and round caps. This unusual appearance gave them a look of holiness. One day they said their prayers in a park and sat down there for a while. An Englishman approached them, touched their backs and then kissed his hand. Friends of his who saw this spectacle, asked him what had prompted him act in that way. He replied; "They are just like Jesus and Moses."

Both the incidents show that living which is obviously simple is as valuable as conforming to the high material standards of society. In fact, when simple living is accompanied with holiness, it commands much more respect than an opulent luxurious life-style.

6 July 1985

The Wrong Signal

When a ship runs into trouble on the high seas, it seeks help by sending a radio message - called an SOS - into port. An SOS is a call for help but it will only be answered if the station that receives the signal attaches the necessary importance to it. If it does not then the message will fall on deaf ears. The only one to hear it will be the transmitter himself.

This is what has befallen those who represent Islam in the modern age. Their speeches and writings amount to an SOS, sent out to God, beseeching Him for help against their oppressors. They have been sending out the same distress signal for at least one hundred years now, but are yet to receive a response to their distress signal. No easing of their affliction has occurred. There can only be one reason for this: God, to who they are sending their SOS, does not attach importance to their message. They are sending out the wrong signal. That is why they are receiving no response.

We Muslims have been asking God to bring destruction down on others, but God is waiting for us to pray for their guidance. We have been asking him to fulfill our nationalistic aspirations, but it is prayers that focus on religious aspirations that God accepts. Instead of seeking to save people from the fire of hell, all we seem to want to do is make hell their final destination. A fire brigade's job is to extinguish fires. If one asks it to fan the flames, then one cannot expect one's request to be granted.

The trouble is that Muslims reckon the gardens of paradise are reserved for them. That is why they do not bother to save others from the fire of hell. If they really feared God, then they would realize that the only ones to escape God's punishment on the Day of Judgment will be those who have sought to rescue others from that fate.

People are busy invoking eternal wrath upon others. If they were to realize that they are on the verge of the same doom themselves, then they would cease their worthless trade. They would cry over their own state, rather than laugh derisively over that of others. They would practice the silence of introspection rather than the clamour abuse.

It is a frail mind that does not bear prosperity as well as adversity with moderation.

-Cicero

Light versus Darkness

God made the world according to His scheme and it perfectly corresponds to it. The believers are those who conform to the pattern created by God and the unbelievers are those who do not. Not conforming to His scheme is tantamount to spreading mischief in God's world. God will soon take them to task, and there will be no escape His punishment which will be eternal.

God brings the sun every morning to illuminate the path of the people; but man brings darkness into the lives of the less fortunate. God provides food for man in abundance so that he may appease his hunger; but man exults in watching others starve. God sends rain so that men and beasts may quench their thirst, but man takes delight in seeing people die with thirst. God opens up vast opportunities for people to build up their lives but man maneuvers to deprive others of them. God showers His blessings on him but others become jealous seek to dishonour him and ruin him.

Adopting such a negative attitude has been cited in the Quran as spreading corruption in the world. This is to go against the divine plan, it is to forsake the divine way and lead a self-ordained life according to one's own will and desires.

In this way, man nullifies the scheme of God which is tantamount rebellion against God. This is the greatest crime that man can commit and it is being perpetrated in the world of God today on a mass scale. Ironically, those who are most involved in this crime are the ones who pass themselves off as upholders of the divine cause on earth.

7 July 1985

The world is stricken by evil so that man can learn to be good

Nobel Laureate Mother Teresa, on a visit to drought-stricken Ethiopia, said that the country's famine was God's way to teaching the world the lesson of charity. "God is teaching us a lesson, He is giving us opportunity to give until it hurts," the 75 year-old leader of the missionaries for charity order told journalists who accompanied her to eastern Ethiopia at the end of December 1984.

God's will be Done

"O, believers, be Allah's helpers. When Jesus, the son of Mary said to the disciples: 'Who will come with me to the help of God?' They replied: 'We are God's helpers.'

Some of the Children of Israel believed in him while others did not. We aided the believers against their enemies and they triumphed over them" (Qur'an 61:14).

Subsequent events show that believers in the Prophet Jesus were powerless and very small in number, while the opponents were powerful and far greater in number. It is hardly remarkable then that after the Prophet Jesus had completed his mission, the unbelievers among the Jews should overpower the followers of Jesus and attempted to crucify him. What is remarkable is that the followers of Christ eventually triumphed over their enemies.

The question arises as to how this came to be so. At first the unbelievers temporarily overcame the believers. They made an attempt to crucify Jesus on the cross of Calvary but God honoured him by raising him up in the heavens.

When the word of God is fully conveyed to a people according to the divine law, the deniers are punished for their rebelliousness. Although Christ's first followers were unable to perform this task, others were made to do it on their behalf. In 70 AD the Roman Emperor Tetus attacked Jerusalem, and killed a number of Jews, expelling many from their homeland. Thus they were scattered to the four corners of the earth. The followers of Jesus, on the other hand, were offered opportunities to carry out their preaching mission and, for this purpose, they spread far and wide. As a result of their struggle many Romans were converted and finally the Roman emperor, Constantine, himself accepted Christianity. It was a time when subjects followed in the footsteps of their rulers. Thus with the conversion of the emperor the process received a great impetus. After only three hundred years, most of the population under the Roman empire became Christian, and Christianity acquired the largest following in the world. The Jews, including what is now Israel, became subjects to Christian nations.

8 July 1985

The least one can do is not harm others

Yahya Ibn Mu'adh Al-Razi once said that if one cannot benefit one's brother, at least one should not harm him.

Reciprocity

When a certain tyre company of the western world was on the point of launching its goods on the market, it ran an advertising campaign which promised that “whoever demonstrated a real defect in the tyres would win a prize of \$ 50,000.” People naturally flocked to buy them. If they found a defect, well and good. If not, they had nothing to lose, because they would actually have purchased a good set of tyres.

The company did then actually receive a number of complaints of which 20 percent appeared to be genuine. The complaints were duly sent invitations to a seminar, their traveling expenses to be paid for by the company. This gave them the opportunity to air their respective views as to how the tyres could be improved. A concrete proposal was finally arrived at by consensus and rewards were distributed at the closure of the seminar.

By taking into consideration the suggestions of its customers the company was able to improve upon the quality of the original tyre. Although the cost had to be increased considerably, the tyres sold far outnumbered previous sales. Formerly the tyres had been manufactured according to the company's own formula, while the improved version was based on the opinions and suggestions of the consumers as well. It was only natural that people should regard the product as being far superior to the original one.

In this world all people – not just manufacturers and consumers – are dependent upon one another. It is, therefore, only sharing and cooperation which can lead to success in this life. It is the principle of give-and-take which should be most active, like two-way traffic. A system of benefits can never be a one-way thing; reciprocity should be the order of the day.

Those psychiatrists who are not superficial have come to the conclusion that the vast neurotic misery of the world could be termed a neurosis of emptiness. Men cut themselves off from the root of their being, from God, and then life turns empty, insane, meaning less, without purpose. So when God goes, goal goes. When goal goes, meaning goes. When meaning goes, value goes, and life turns dead on our hands.

-Carl Jung

When the Mighty will be Brought Low

When matches were first produced the manufactures wanted to find out the extent of their combusive power. So they took some wood and tested their matches by setting light to it. Soon the time came when scientists started making experimental guinea pigs out of animals, feeding them poisonous substances, putting parts of their bodies out of operation and killing them for purposes of analysis. Now the form that experiments take has entered a third stage. Man has now taken to experimenting with his fellow men. Some worldly powers have attained the status of "super powers". With lethal arms in their possession, they feel entitled to test the effectiveness of their weapons on weak people. A recent NATO report showed how, in the Spanish Civil War, Hitler had his tanks and bombers used without restraint. The destruction which they caused to innocent people did not take anything away from what Hitler considered his success, for what he had wanted to do was test his weapons, and this purpose had been achieved. The same thing happened in Vietnam. The Americans used their helicopters in huge quantities in this war, the first time in history that helicopters had been put to military use. The result was destruction for Vietnam, but success for mighty America in their experiment. The effectiveness of their helicopter gun ships could only be gauged in action. This had been done at the expense of Vietnam.

Now it is the turn of Russia. They too have manufactured an advanced form of helicopter, and are using the country of Afghanistan to try it out. The relatively backward central Asian country has been converted into an arena in which Russia tests its most advanced weapons of war. Whole villages have been exterminated. Three million people have left their country and taken refuge in neighbouring Pakistan. But the Russians have what they want. The more destruction that they reap, the better they are able to test the weapons in their arsenal.

Is this world fated to remain in darkness? Can it really be that God will let the mighty continue to benefit for their might and the weak suffer for their vulnerability? As the Qur'an says, to think such a thing is to deny the very nature of God:

"It was not in vain that we created the heavens and the earth and all that lies between them. That is the fancy of the unbelievers. But woe to the unbelievers because of the fire of hell. Are we to treat alike those that have faith and do good works, and those that corrupt the earth with wickedness? Are we to treat the righteous as we treat the wicked?" (Qur'an, 38:27-28)

Those who are enthralled in their wicked ways will soon find out that God – not they – is master of this world. When the angel of death comes upon them they will see that in reality they had no more power than insects. The things that supported them, that gave them power in this world, will desert them. They will find themselves lying on their faces in the pit of doom. They will cry out, but there will be no one to hear their cry; they will seek help, but no one will come to their assistance.

11 July 1985

Leaving God to deal with any harm done to one

Imam Zain'ul-'Abidin (38-4AH) was the son of Imam Husain Ibn 'Ali. He was the only member of Husain's family to escape the slaughter of Karbala. Someone once told him of a person who spoke ill of him, and wanted to do him down. Imam Zain'ul-'Abidin asked to be taken to see this person. Meeting him, he first greeted him with "peace be upon you". Then he said: "If what you say is true, then I pray that God should forgive me. And if it is false, I pray that he should forgive you."

11 July 1985

Looking at one's own faults rather than those of others

Rabee' Ibn Khaythima never used to say anything against anyone. Once he expressed his amazement at people who fear God with regard to others' faults, but not with regard to their own.

11 July 1985

Obeying God and His Prophet

Abu Huzaifa had a liking for good food. Having partaken to his heart's content of some delicious food, he once entered the Prophet's company. He was sitting with the Prophet when he inadvertently emitted a blech. The Prophet heard and said: "The most satiated in this world will be the hungriest on the Day of Resurrection." The prophet's words had such an impact on Abu Huzaifa that he never ate to satiety again.

Unity at All Costs

There is no greater source of strength in the world than unity, and no greater source of weakness than disunity. That is why Islam teaches one to maintain unity at all costs, no matter how much one has to sacrifice in the process.

When Moses was rescued from the Pharaoh he visited Mount Sinai for forty days. While he was away Samiri lured the Israelites into worshipping a golden calf. Moses' brother Aaron had been left in charge of the people during Moses' absence. He did his best to discourage them from worshipping the calf, but with no success. When Moses returned to see his people worshipping an idol he took his brother Aaron severely to task. "What stopped you", he asked his brother, "from putting the people right when you saw that they had gone astray. Why did you disobey me?" This is how Aaron excused himself:

"Son of my mother. Do not seize my beard or the hair of my head. I was afraid that you might say: 'You have sown discord among the Children of Israel and did not wait for my orders'." (Qur'an, 20:92-93)

Aaron was responsible for the Israelites while Moses was away. When he saw that the people have been led astray by one person's deception, he did his best, by verbal admonition, to make them change their ways; but his words fell on empty ears. Aaron was a prophet like his brother. In the answer that he gave Moses, he told him why he had not taken practical steps to arrest this dangerous trend. He had made do with verbal admonition because he feared that to go further and take practical measures would, far from having the desired effect, cause irreparable division among the Israelites, with some people taking his side, and others Samiri's. Such division would have led to inevitable conflict. Better, Aaron thought, to refrain from taking practical measures until his brother Moses returned. Then the matter would be settled without the seeds of discord and fratricide being sown among the people.

The fact that Moses accepted Aaron's excuse shows that both prophets saw the importance of maintaining unity at all costs. Solidarity in a community is so important that the greatest prices can be paid in order to maintain it. In the life of a community everything else comes after solidarity. Solidarity is the first priority. There is no point bringing in other reforms when the unity of a people is sacrificed in process.

Unforeseen Circumstances

A woman belonging to Lima in South America, having failed to find a satisfactory job made up her mind to try her luck in North America, an affluent country. Too poor to afford an air fare, she conceived the notion of shutting herself inside a suitcase and having herself dispatched as a piece of luggage. The plan was carried out.

The plane which carried her landed at the Los Angeles International airport. All the bags of the passengers were unloaded from the aeroplane for collection. All but one suitcase was uncollected. The police, therefore, intervened to open this abandoned suitcase and take into custody the goods inside so that it could be handed over to the claimant whenever he turned up. Much to their horror, they unlocked it to find the corpse of a woman. Detectives were called in to investigate the case. They said:

“The woman may have been crushed by the weight of other luggage” (UPI).

This incident serves to illustrate one of life's truths: taking whatever steps we feel are necessary does not, in itself, ensure our success. This is because there are so many external and unforeseen factors involved which determine the course of our actions. We must take them into account whenever we are deciding upon a course of action. It is only when these factors are in consonance with the steps taken, that we can hope to reach our destination.

This state of affairs takes a more critical turn when the offender is a leader and he goes wrong in framing a policy which involves the whole nation. This is bound to cause widespread misery, if not total destruction. It is, therefore, imperative that a leader be as discreet and careful as possible in his decision-making. He should consider of the possible pros and cons. He should look before he leaps. His failing to do so would amount to an unpardonable offence. It would be far far better for him to take no action at all than to plunge the whole nation into strife and torment.

Natural Simplicity

The prophet of Islam made just one Hajj during the period of his prophetic mission. This Hajj of the Prophet is known as his farewell pilgrimage. He performed it a few months before his death, in the year 10AH.

A detailed account of the Farewell pilgrimage has been given in traditions of the Prophet. We are told how, after circumambulating the House of God in Mecca, he performed Sa'i, which consisted of running seven times between the hills of Safa and Marwa. He commenced the Sa'i from the hill of Safa, saying as he did so: "Safa and Marwa are among God's symbols' (Qur'an, 2:158). I am starting where God started."

In the verse of the Qur'an mentioning Safa and Marwa, Safa comes first and Marwa second. The Prophet considered it natural to start his Sa'i at Safa, and then proceed to Marwa, because that was the sequence followed in the Qur'an.

This apparently trivial incident contains great significance, for it shows Islam's preference for simplicity. For the Prophet to have commenced his Sa'i from Marwa would have put people to unnecessary inconvenience. They would have had to keep two sequences in mind – that in the Qur'an and the one followed during the rites of pilgrimage – instead of just one. So the Prophet adopted the same sequence in pilgrimage as had been followed in the Qur'an, thus saving people the trouble of remembering two different orders.

Simplicity is a factor essential to the spirit of Islam. We can see it in every area of Islamic teachings. Islam is absolutely free of perplexing complications and unwarranted formalities. Emphasis has been laid on the spirit of worship; the form which worship takes has been given secondary importance. A distinction has been drawn between fundamentals on the one hand, and subordinate matters on the other: fundamental importance has been attached to the basics, with subordinate issues occupying a subordinate position in the Islamic structure. Islam is based on Simple realities of life; intellectual polemics and analogical intricacies have been put aside. There is nothing artificial or forced about accepting Islam. It is an absolutely natural event, as simple as adopting air and water.

Ephemerality

The Fabian society was founded in 1883-84 in London, having as its goal the establishment of a democratic Socialist state in Great Britain. The Fabians put their faith in evolutionary Socialism rather than in revolution. They were true pioneers in British social and economic reform and were concerned mainly with the eradication of poverty and ignorance through education.

The name of the society was derived from the Roman general Fabius Conctator, whose patient and evasive tactics in avoiding pitched battles secured his ultimate victory over stronger forces. Early members included George Bernard Shaw, Sidney Webb, Annie Besant, Edward Pease, and Graham Wallace. Shaw and Webb, later joined by Webb's wife, Beatrice Webb, were the outstanding leaders of this society for many years.

Beatrice Webb's diary, which was published after her death, became very popular. Here is an excerpt from it, written in 1943 during the Second World War:

"Everything and everyone is disappearing – Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin. What an amazing happening, and well worth recording in my diary. But that also will suddenly disappear" (1943).

What outstanding people come into this world, show their metal and then suddenly disappear; as if their appearance and disappearance were not a matter of their own choice, but the responsibility of someone or something else, who summoned them back quite arbitrarily – like marionettes disappearing at a tug of their strings.

This coming and going of people, this ephemerality of life, remains explicable until we accept the existence of a life after death, as the prophets foretold. By taking into account this truth, everything seems fall quite satisfactorily into place. If life is transient we can accept it as being so, and have no regrets.

But should we reject the actuality of a life after death, everything is rendered void and meaningless.

He who repents of sin is even as he who has no sin.

–Prophet Muhammad

Proof and Personality

The Qur'an has gone into the story of Moses and Pharaoh in several places, and in considerable detail. It has described what happened when the Pharaoh summoned the Egyptian magicians to take Moses on. The magicians threw their wands and ropes into the arena. By magic, they appeared as snakes, writhing on the ground. God then commanded Moses to cast his staff. It turned into a serpent, far larger than any other, which devoured all that they had contrived. The magicians' instruments reverted to their original form.

On seeing this, the magicians realized that Moses was not dealing in magic – he was dealing in divine truths. Moses' miraculous display gave them a glimpse of the face of the Lord. They believed there and then. The Pharaoh was humiliated. Furious, he pronounced on them the severest punishment in the land – that their hands and feet should be amputated from opposite sides, and that they should then be tied to the trunks of palm trees and crucified. When the magicians heard the sentence they replied:

“ 'We cannot prefer you to the clear signs which have come to us'”

(Qur'an, 20:72)

On the one side the magicians were confronted with an awesome personality, on the other with clear proofs. As befits a truthful human being they left the former and took the latter. They preferred truth to power, proofs to personality.

When one is confronted with a sign which proves conclusively the truth of something, then there is only one thing to do. One must put his proof first and forsake people who oppose it. When signs of truth are made manifest in this manner, then it is as if God Himself has come out into the open. One who puts personalities before them has put mortals before the Eternal God. Such a person has no place in the world of God, for he has offered allegiance to one who is not his true master; he had made a god of one who is not really God. One who forsakes the true God, and attaches himself to false one, can never prosper in this world of God.

A good heart is better than all the heads in the world.

–Bulwer Lytton

The Caller to God

Imagine that a scientist, whose instruments tell him that within a few minutes an earthquake will strike, is standing in a building. There are at the same time certain mundane affairs to be dealt with in the building. What will he do, talk about trivialities or warn people of the earthquake? Clearly, the other matters which he has to attend to will recede into insignificance. He will forget all about them and raise just one cry: he will tell people to leave the place immediately, for an earthquake is about to shatter the place to pieces. Far from giving people a lecture on the mundane matters that have to be attended to within the building; he will implore them to abandon the building at once.

Now think of a person standing in between this world and the next. On the one side, he can see the present world. On the other, the gardens of paradise and the fire of hell stretch out before his eyes. What would he be expected to do in this situation? Will he stress the importance of worldly issues or will he draw people's attention to what lies ahead? Clearly, he will not dwell on mundane matters. Worldly issues will recede into insignificance besides the desperately pressing issues of eternity. He will have just one message for people – that they should guard themselves from the fire of hell and become worthy of admission into the gardens of paradise.

One who does not know of the coming of an earthquake might be forgiven for dwelling on other matters. But one who sees an earthquake coming will be able to think and talk of nothing else. He might not even be able to construct a coherent sentence, urging people to take precautions against the earthquake that is going to strike. He might only be able to muster a desperate: "Earthquake! Earthquake!"

It is the same with one who calls mankind to God. The caller to God is one who can detect, from behind the veil that lies between this world and the next, the fragrance of the gardens of paradise and the heat of the fire of hell. Such a person can think and talk of nothing but the next eternal world. Everything to do with this ephemeral world will fade from his mind as if it did not exist at all.

Conscience warns us as a friend before it punishes us as a judge.

Indelible Recording

Just as human technology has developed means of making recordings, so it has developed means of erasing them. A recording which does not meet with one's satisfaction can be wiped out, as if it had never been made in the first place.

Tony Benn, Labour MP for Chesterfield in the British House of Commons, was visited recently by a reporter hoping to interview him for the BBC Radio programme "The World this Weekend". A little way into the interview a sharp disagreement occurred about the way the conversation was developing. Mr. Benn was determined that no part of the interview should be transmitted. And so it was that, before the reporter's astonished eyes, he reached into a cupboard and produced a powerful electro-magnet which he duly plugged in and waved over the tape, thereby completely erasing all traces of the conversation that had just taken place (*The Guardian*, February 3, 1985).

This simple incident gives us an important insight into the difference between this world and the next. When one is caught in a tight spot in this world there is always some way of making good one's escape. Even if one's words have been recorded on tape, there are devices that erase every word one has said, giving one an absolutely "clear record".

The next world, on the other hand, will be a world of realities. There, deception, delusion and concealment will have no place. The recording that has been made on God's cosmic tape machine of all men's words and actions will be replayed. If it is not to our satisfaction we will grope for some new, powerful technological weapon with which to erase it, but none will come to hand. We will be answerable for everything we have said and done, and upon it our eternal fate will hinge.

The trouble is that because we can get away with anything in this world, we feel that the same will be the case in the next. This is our test in this world. Here realities have been covered in a delusive veil. Man's inherent powerlessness has been clothed in a coat of power. In the next world reality will come out into the open in undeniable and inescapable form. Everyone will be forced to accept it. Successful are they who live in accordance with that reality before it is forced upon them; who make themselves powerless in this world, while they still have the power to rebel; who control their words and actions, even though they are outwardly free to do and say as they like.

Practising what one Preaches

Malik Abdul Shakoor (b. 1946), from Budhal, in Rajouri, India, used to be an inveterate chain-smoker. Slogans like "Cigarette-smoking is harmful to health" and "When you light a fag you are setting light to your own hard-earned money", would have no effect on him. He even used to force his friends to smoke. To have a cigarette after tea was so important to him that he used to say that anyone who does not do so has no right to partake of tea either.

But in the end Malik Abdul Shakoor gave up even his beloved habit, and it was just a trivial incident which persuaded him to do so. His three-year-old son, Farooq Qaisar, had developed a habit of picking up the cigarette butts that his father threw away, and putting them into his mouth. However much his father discouraged him, he would not pay any heed. One day, when the child's mother told her son off severely, he burst out: "But Daddy smokes, why shouldn't I?" Malik Abdul Shakoor was shocked to hear the child's words. Although he used to praise cigarette-smoking in front of his friends, in his heart he knew that it was a bad habit, destructive to character as well as health and money. True, he used to put on a brave face in front of those who urged him to give up smoking, but this was only because he was not ready to take their advice. Had he been prepared psychologically for the effort involved in giving up smoking, then he would also have been prepared to admit that he was in the wrong – that cigarette-smoking was a bad habit that should be avoided. But, reluctant to even open his mind to the evils of the habit, he would touch extremes of eloquence in his attempts to prove that there was nothing wrong with smoking, and would even press others to take it up themselves.

But now it became a matter of giving up smoking or risk ruining his dear son's life. Suddenly all the mental barriers, which had prevented him from accepting a simple truth, broke down. He had stood firm when faced with powerful evidence, but he had no answer to the helpless cry of his own child. "If I don't give up smoking," he thought, "then how can I stop my son from smoking?" He could not bear to think of his son smoking, and using the fact that his father smoked to justify his action. The child's simple words: "Daddy Smokes, why shouldn't I?" made him into a new man. He immediately decided to give up smoking. It was Ramadhan – the month of fasting – and he vowed to forsake the habit there and then. Not only did he abstain from cigarette-smoking for the rest of the month; he gave it up permanently, and has not smoked since.

Muslims often say that before Islam can be communicated to others, the Muslims themselves must fully practice their faith. But the case of Malik Abdul Shakoor is a simple example which shows that the best way to reform oneself is to have a passionate urge to reform others. The truth is that Islam can only really be adopted, both inside and outside the present Muslim community, if Muslims are filled once more with missionary spirit. Only if they realize that they have a responsibility to convey the message of Islam to the rest of the world will they become responsible Muslims themselves. In their desire to make others into good Muslims, they too will become good Muslims, for otherwise people will protest, like Malik Abdul Shakoor's son, that one who cannot practice what he preaches is not entitled to preach.

20 July 1985

The Virtues of Dependability

During a recent visit to Europe, Habib Bhai from Hyderabad purchased a camera from a shop at Lausanne in Switzerland, at a cost of about Indian rupees 5000. Before long he realized he had made a mistake. He could have bought it in Saudi Arabia much cheaper – for about Rs. 3000, and he had been planning to visit Saudi Arabia on his way back to India. He decided to return the camera, but was at a loss to know what he should say to the shopkeeper. Still, he could not resist the idea of going to the shop and trying his luck. He went up to the sales woman at the counter and asked her for a refund on the camera. Much to his astonishment, the lady did not even ask him why he wanted to return it. All she asked was: “Do you want the money in Indian or American currency?” She handed him a slip to take over to another counter where he would receive his money back. The money was immediately refunded as if it made no difference to the shopkeepers whether they had money or goods.

The reason that the camera was taken back without demur was that the shopkeepers were sure that before long another customer would come along and buy it. Their article was of dependable quality: if one person did not require it, another would.

The Message of the Qur'an

In the Name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful

"And when we took a covenant from the Children of Israel: serve none but God. Show kindness to your parents, to your kinsfolk, to the orphans, and to the destitute. Speak fair to the people. Attend to your prayers and pay the poor-due. But you all turned your backs except a few, and gave no heed" (2:83).

Man's first duty to God is to serve Him and ascribe no partners unto Him. Secondly, he should show kindness to others. Kindness starts at home, with one's parents and family, extends to one's neighbours and relatives, and finally reaches out to everyone with whom one comes into contact. There is only one proper way to deal with others, and that is with justice and benevolence.

In this matter, one is really tested in one's dealings with "orphans and the destitute", that is, with the weaker members of society. As for the strong, their strength itself guarantees that they will be given deferential treatment. It is to the weak, therefore, that one should be especially careful to show kindness. People who are kind to those who wield no worldly power and resources do so for God's sake alone, for there is no other incentive at work.

There are various reasons for being less inclined to show kindness when dealing with the weak. Those who provide assistance to the weak tend to think of themselves as superiors. They are then prevented by their superiority complex from having regard for their beneficiary's self-respect. Benefactors expect to be looked up to. Anyone who fails to show the deference expected of him is considered unworthy, and treated accordingly with disdain. Sometimes one person helping another on just a few occasions may feel that he is incurring a permanent liability and will then mistreat the object of his charity in order to free himself from an irksome duty. But it is not enough just to deliver fine speeches. Nor is it enough to play with fair words. It is one's actual recognition of another's moral worth in one's day-to-day treatment of him that is of paramount importance. This means addressing him with deference and respect, however humble and defence-less he may be. This is something which man is loath to do, but without this, one cannot be a true well-wisher of one's fellow men.

"And when We made a covenant with you: You shall not shed your kinsmen's blood or turn them out of their dwellings, to this you consented and bore witness. Yet there you are, slaying your own kinsfolk, and turning a number of them out of their dwellings, and helping each other against them with sin and aggression. Though should they come to you as captives, you would ransom them. Surely their expulsion was unlawful. Do you then believe in one part of the Scriptures and deny another?"

Those of you that act thus shall be rewarded with disgrace in this world and with the most grievous punishment (on the Day of Resurrection). God is watching over all your actions.

Such are they who buy the life of this world at the price of the life to come. Their punishment shall not be lightened, nor shall they be helped (2:84-86).

Before the advent of Islam, three Jewish tribes inhabited the area around Medina: Banu Nadheer, Banu Quraiza, and Banu Qainqa'a. Despite the fact that all of them adhered to Mosaic law, ignorant prejudices had divided them into two groups. They had become enmeshed, along with the polytheist tribes of Median – Aus and Khazraj – in political maneuvering. Banu Nadhir and Banu Quraiza had aligned themselves with the Aus tribe, and the Banu Qainqa'a with the Khazraj. Split into separate camps in this manner, the three Jewish tribes were constantly at war with one another. In the Battle of Bua'ath, for instance, which occurred five years before the Prophet's emigration to Medina, Jew had fought Jew alongside their rival Arab allies, killing their co-religionists and expelling them from their homes. Then, when hostilities ceased, they used to appeal for funds to ransom their brethren who had been taken captive by the pagan Arabs. Such action, they would say, had been laid down in the Torah. They were willing to break God's commandments in regard to the life and property of other Jews. Then they would adopt a humanitarian posture on behalf of the victims of their own cruelty seeking to clothe their self-interested politics in a cloak of piety.

This is just like killing someone unjustly, and then giving him a religious funeral. Piety does not merely consist of performing such rituals: it consists of forsaking pagan ways, suppressing one's selfish desires, controlling one's politics in the interest of one's religion. This is the essence of true piety, but people do not like to involve themselves in such arduous practices. They prefer to put on a pretence of piety by conducting superficial rituals. This is tantamount to issuing a self-made edition of divine religion; it is to disregard the eternal aspect of religion and attach importance to the worldly aspect, in the hope that zeal in performing actions which hold promise of worldly fame will qualify them for the reward of true piety. But such brazen distortion of religion can only earn one God's punishment; it does not entitle one to any reward.

Faith Conquers All

When, in a dream, Abraham saw himself sacrificing his own son, he interpreted this as a commandment from God and, without the slightest wavering or hesitation; he decided to carry it out. But no sooner had he put the knife on the throat of his son than he heard a voice commanding him to stop. He had passed the test by showing whole hearted willingness to obey the word of God. He was then provided with a lamb to be sacrificed instead.

This event shows that, in most cases, a sacrifice is called for, but not accepted. The 'knife' is taken away before it cuts the 'throat'.

The real test, in actual fact, is not physical but psychological. It is man's willingness or unwillingness that is put to the test, through the act. The actual act is not required in itself. God does not take man to task unnecessarily. But only those are absolved from sacrifice who have proved their willingness to make one.

Eschewing the path of sacrifice to a God who is most compassionate – loving His servants far more than their parents – serves to prove that faith in God is lacking in one. It amounts to distrust in the love of God. God gives far far more than he takes. Abraham was asked to present to God only a son, and God, in return, conferred on him the leadership of the whole world.

Man must serve God without wavering even in the slightest degree, shedding all reservations. He must have full faith in his most kind, compassionate Creator who is watching over him every moment. God does test man but the moment he is going to take the plunge, He comes forward and saves him.

How strange it is then for the son not to trust the call of his father. How strange it is for man to lose confidence in his Lord.

The Prophet and His Companions

The greatest work is that which requires the greatest effort on one's own part

The Prophet mentioned three of the most difficult actions; to be just with people in matters concerning oneself; to help one's brethren with one's wealth; and to remember God in all circumstances.

To serve the cause of religion is not enough to deserve paradise.

The Prophet told of a man who fought with all his might in the Battle of Hunayn. When he was killed, news of his death spread far and wide. People made much of his bravery, and were sure that he must have attained the status of martyrdom. When the Prophet heard what people were saying, he told them that the person concerned was among the people of the Fire. There was puzzlement at the Prophet's words, for the man's intrepid bravery was still fresh in people's memory. The Prophet told them to go and find out the circumstances in which he had died. It turned out that he had been wounded in battle. When night came, unable to bear the pain of his wounds, he committed suicide. (Far from leading one to martyrdom, suicide is an unlawful act which cannot be justified under any circumstances.) The Prophet was told of people's findings. "I bear witness that I am God's servant and prophet," he said. Then he sent Bilal to tell the people that only a real, true Muslim would enter heaven. "And God strengthens this religion through profligates too."

(Bukhari)

The hypocrisy of climbing on bandwagons

When the Prophet emigrated from Mecca to Medina, 'Abdullah Ibn Ubayy and his associates did all they could to make life difficult for the Prophet, and obstruct him in his mission. With the Battle of Badr, when great leaders of the Quraish were slain, 'Abdullah Ibn Ubayy's group realized that there was no stopping the progress of Islam. Outwardly, they accepted Islam. But since they were not sincere in their conversion, they soon took to plotting against the faith.

Thinking nothing of one's actions

Someone said to 'Umar that he had rendered great services to religion. He would surely have a great position with God. "If there is nothing for me or against me, that will be enough," 'Umar' replied.